# What the Bible Teaches About War

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# What the Bible Teaches About War and the Christian's Attitude in the Present Crisis

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*"And surely your blood of your lives will I require; at the hand of every beast will I require it, and at the hand of man; at the hand of every man's brother will I require the life of man. Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God made he man."* Genesis 9:5, 6.

*"Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's."* Matthew 22:21.

## I

This is an attempt to answer numerous inquiries as to the Christian's relation to war, and the significance of the present war in the light of prophecy.

One of these inquiries is as to whether God is the author of war, to which I would answer "No," any more than He is the author of sin. Yet war came into the world *with* sin, and *God* brought it in, to the glory of His grace he it said. Satan supposed that he had made a firm and harmonious compact with man to last forever, but God immediately interposed with the dictum, "I have put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed." That enmity has been maintained in all the ages and centuries since, and will continue until in the moral sense, Satan is bruised under the feet of the saints, and as to his person, he is bound and cast into the bottomless pit. All wars among the nations are traceable to, and grow out of this primal declaration of war, and not a few of them have had a most intimate relation to the fulfilment of its promise, and a practical bearing upon the redemption of the race to which it applies.

## II

Why are wars hated and dreaded as they are? Naturally, because of the loss and suffering they entail. But was there ever a war of such devastation as the flood represented in the days of Noah? And

why the flood? What explains that suffering and loss? The same thing that explains war. God saw that "the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart." (Gen. 6:5, 6.) Hence He swept man off the earth with the exception of eight souls.

After the flood, however, man got another chance, and God renewed His covenant with him, but He added an obligation to it of a magisterial nature, which, so far as I know the Scriptures, has never been repealed. "The blood of your lives," said He, "will I require * * * * At the hand of every man's hrother will I require the life of man. Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God made he man."

This is not to say that if A kills B, then C is to kill A, for it is obvious that once that ball were started rolling, there could be no intermission of the killing till the race was reduced to one. But it means that man is now a magistrate as was not the case prior to the flood. He is now clothed with public civil authority, he is an executive or judicial officer, and, under prescribed circumstances, represents God in executing penalties upon wrongdoing and especially the penalty of death for death.

This law was re-enacted in the sixth commandment, "Thou shalt not kill," and as another says, "it was confirmed and carried deep down into the region of legislation for the heart in the Sermon on the Mount." It lies at the base of what the state calls capital punishment, and it is as well, the foundation of that international jurisprudence which moves nations to declare war.

To dwell, in passing, upon capital punishment, I feel impelled to say that those legislators who are responsible for its abolishment in local instances, are unwittingly assuming to be wiser and more merciful than God. "They are breaking down His instruction of the race both in nature and in Scripture, they are weakening the sense of mutual obligation, and are giving free rein to human passion and hatred." (Augustus H. Strong.) Wordsworth, in his ode on "The Punishment of Death," has condensed into a single sonnet more truth

on this subject than is contained in volumes of modern sentimentalists, when he says, in part:

> "Lawgivers, beware,
> Lest capital pains remitting till ye spare
> The murderer, ye, by sanction to that thought
> Seemingly given, debase the general mind."

III

I am indebted to Dr. A. B. Simpson of the Christian Alliance, for a biblical illustration of the magisterial function on a broad scale, which otherwise might have escaped me. It is the story in the 14th of Genesis, concerning Abraham's conflict with the confederate kings, the historicity of which is established by independent evidence. It was just after he had received the covenant of faith and the land of Canaan as his inheritance, that he was forced to meet an invasion by one of the world's great empires of that time. And it was under divine inspiration, and by special divine equipment that he arose to meet it; and in meeting it, to defend the rights which God had bestowed on him as part of His plan for the redemption of the race on the basis of that first promise. It was an extraordinary battle, with picked soldiers, a forced march, and a surprise attack; but it was entirely successful and entirely approved in the court of heaven as shown in his receiving the blessing of Melchisedec, the priest of the Most High God.

But even a more outstanding illustration of the same principle is furnished by the history of Egypt in the time of Moses. What loss and suffering, what devastation is represented by the plagues that fell upon that land! And yet this is eclipsed in awfulness by the drowning of the Egyptian host in the Red Sea! No one can understand the import of this conflict, who does not perceive that now for the first time since the dispersion of the nations the opposition between God and Satan in the history of mankind *came out into broad daylight.* As Dr. Murphy says, in his great work on Exodus, "Egypt for the time being represents the kingdom of darkness, and the battle to be fought is the model and type of all future warfare between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. Hence it arises to a

transcendant importance in the ways of God with man, and holds a place even in the preface to the ten commandments."

The conquest of Canaan stands out similarly, and if anything were needed to convince us beyond a peradventure of the righteousness of that terrible proceeding, it is the presence of the God-man who at the very beginning of that campaign stood over against Joshua at Gilgal. A drawn sword was in his hand, and when Joshua demanded, "Art thou for us or for our adversaries?" He said, "Nay, but as captain of the host of the Lord am I now come." (Josh. 5:13-15.) The context shows this to be none other than Jehovah-Jesus, the second person of the trinity, whose nature and purpose as the God of war have not changed in all the centuries as He has had to deal with nations in disobedience and rebellion.

But the conquest of Canaan is only partially completed under Joshua, and hence war continues even into David's time. And here again is it often incited by God, who sometimes indicates the plan of warfare, gives signal instances of His presence and favor, and regards with jealousy ascription of the victory to any other than Himself. "He teaches my hands to war," says David, "so that a bow of steel is broken by mine arms. Thou hast girded me with strength unto the battle; thou hast subdued under me those that rose up against me. Therefore will I give thanks unto thee, O Lord, among the nations, and sing praises unto thy name." (Ps. 18:34, 39, 49.)

And so the history continues as every reader of the Old Testament is aware. It is largely a recital of the wars in which Jehovah is the aggressor, either on behalf of His people Israel, or against them when their conduct requires punishment.

## IV

All this will be admitted of course, but there are those who, shrinking from the conclusion deducible from it, would confine it to the Old Testament. They say that God is there dealing with Israel in a peculiar way. She is His instrument of redemption, and His school of instruction for the whole world. She must be protected and her interests conserved for the benefit of all the other nations.

But now that she has passed off the scene and the church has taken her place as the divine witness, God is dealing with the nations in another way, and our attitude towards war must in consequence be radically changed. To quote the language of one of these, "We must distinguish between the outward and visible forces which opposed Israel, and those invisible principalities and powers which the Christian is to combat, and which lie back of all the greed and hate which create war."

This is very specious reasoning, and shows a lack of acquaintance with the Word of God where it should not be expected. As a matter of fact Israel still exists, not indeed in an organized national capacity, but as an instrument for the execution of the divine will. War is still carried on in her behalf, and God is still an aggressor in the premises. Jonah in the whale's belly is the type of Israel among the Gentile nations. All their unrest today is because she is not in her own land, and carrying out her divinely-ordained mission. The history of the world-empires as foreshadowed in the book of Daniel proves this. The conflict between autocracy on the one hand and democracy on the other, now prevailing among the greater part of the nations of the earth is but a fulfilment of the dream of Nebuchadnezzar and Daniel's interpretation of it. Moreover, when the church is taken from the earth at the coming of the Lord for her, and Israel's history as a nation begins again, the same wars are seen among the nations and God is seen avenging and judging in the midst of them. This is the only key to the book of Revelation.

From all this therefore, there are certain principles to be learned:

1. *War is a consequence of sin.* Were there no sin there would be no war, but so long as sin exists war must be expected. All the peace palaces ever built, all the leagues to enforce peace ever formed, all the international treaties ever signed can not make it otherwise.

2. *War is a divine punishment for sin.* Man is ever shedding man's blood, and God is ever requiring it at his hands. When our own Ulysses S. Grant said that our Civil War was a divine penalty for our earlier treatment of Mexico, he was only pointing to another illustration of this principle.

3. *Nations, under God, have magisterial functions to perform in*

*declaring and conducting war.* Assyria was the rod of God's anger and the staff of His indignation against Israel. The inspired Isaiah tells us so. Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, was His servant to subjugate all the nations of his day, including Judah. Jeremiah is authority for that. Jerusalem was trodden down of the Gentiles because "they walked not in my statutes, and despised my judgments." So says Ezekiel speaking for Jehovah. The moral depravity of Greece and Rome brought down upon them the barbarians of the North. Historians are a unit as to this. Germany is now the scourge of half the nations of the earth. Belgium, whose sorrows we deplore, is reaping what she sowed in the atrocites of the Congo, Bleeding France, whose wounds we fain would heal in reciprocity of love, is paying the penalty of her atheism. Russia is receiving of the Lord's hand for her persecution of the Jew, and Turkey for her treatment of the Armenian. Great Britain has been mocking God as a Christian nation while fostering, for commercial gain, the rank heathenism of India. And the United States? Is there any nation on the earth today, more proud, more worldly-minded, more self-contained, more needing a humbling at the hand of God in the experiences of a distressing war?

4. *Finally, it sometimes becomes the duty of nations to declare war.* If Israel had not done so, more than once, she would have defied God and suffered the penalty of His broken law. If Charles Martel, the grandfather of Charlemagne, had not fought and defeated the Saracens in the eighth century, all Europe, and perhaps America, now would have been Mohammedan. Few will deny that the victory of Wellington at Waterloo was a gracious act of God. And the American Revolution? What if the "embattled farmers" at Concord Bridge had never "fired the shot heard round the world?" And the Civil War? Should not we have freed the slaves? And Cuba and the Philippines? Does not their condition today as compared with that prior to the battle of Manila Bay, prove the altruistic character of our war with Spain? And last of all, what of the earnest words of our chief magistrate in the present crisis? Addressing Congress on April 2, he said:

"It will be all the easier for us to conduct ourselves as bellig-

erents in a spirit of right and fairness, because we act not in enmity towards a people or with a desire to bring any injury or disadvantage upon them, but only in opposition to an irresponsible government which has thrown aside all considerations of humanity, and is running amuck."

If it is not the clear duty of this nation to do its part to save humanity from this scourge, then it is difficult to see what duty in the case of any nation means.

Suppose at this moment some frenzied man were to rise in this assembly, armed with a gun in one hand, a bowie-knife in the other. And suppose he were to tear up and down these aisles shooting with the one and slashing right and left with the other? Would not the other men arise and seek to lay hold of him and disarm him, and convey him to a place where he could do no further harm to them or others until he had recovered his sanity? They would not hate him. They would pity him, and as Christians they would love him and be glad to help him on his feet again when it might be done with safety to all concerned. And such as I understand it, is the benevolent and humanitarian purpose in which the United States has entered upon this awful war.

## V

But still it may be asked, What about the Christian's duty in the premises?

Paul says, "Our citizenship is in heaven" (Phil. 3:20), and does not that mean our separation from human wars? In spirit, in motive and in aim, "Yes," the Christian has nothing to do with wars in such a sense, but in fulfilment of common duty, "No."

That allusion to our heavenly citizenship is misunderstood. Paul is exhorting the Christians at Philippi to follow his example in the subjection of the body. He is speaking of immorality, that Epicurean carelessness of habit expressed in the words, "Whose God is their belly." The chief concern of those he had in mind was the gratification of their bodily appetites. They minded "earthly things" in this sense, and he would have them to be heavenly-minded. "Our citizenship," our "city-home" as Bishop Moule translates it, "is in heaven." We are far away from it, but we ought to live as those who belong to

it. But does this mean that we have no earthly citizenship at all? Would that be rendering "unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's?"

Let Paul himself be our example and our teacher in this respect. He justly valued his Roman citizenship and on two or three memorable occasions availed himself of it for deliverance from danger. When he was a prisoner at Philippi, when arrested at Jerusalem, and when on trial before Festus. And hearken to his instruction to the church at Rome: "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God; the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God."

We heard recently that Paul did not have war in mind when he wrote those words, but how any one could be aware of that we do not know. However, the question is not what Paul had in mind, but what the Holy Spirit had in mind when He inspired Paul to write the words. And indeed, as to Paul himself, how such an application of his words could be absent from his mind is difficult to imagine, when we recall that military glory was as much the ideal of the Roman people as human wisdom was of the Greeks. Paul was accustomed to soldiers. He often expressed himself in terms of human warfare, and one of the strongest similes he uses in his instruction to his beloved Timothy is, to "endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ." Soldiers, as such, are never condemned in the Word of God, and several of them are honored as men of strong piety and faith.

We were referring to Abraham a few moments ago. Surely his citizenship was in heaven, for it is expressly said of him that "he sojourned in the land of promise as in a strange country, * * * for he looked for a city that hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." (Heb. 11:9, 10.) And yet he was a valiant and successful earthly warrior. His head was in the clouds, but he kept his feet on the ground, and every spiritual child of Abraham in these trying days should do likewise.

## VI

But in the same connection, take Christ's words in the Sermon on the Mount, "Resist not evil," and "Love your enemies." And

those in another place, "they that take the sword shall perish with the sword." (Matt. 26:52.) What shall we say to this?

In the first place, let us remember that Christ prefaced His Sermon on the Mount by saying: "Think not that I am come to destroy the law and the prophets; I came not to destroy but to fulfill." Therefore, whatever these words may mean, they cannot mean the abolition of the magisterial functions and obligations of men and of nations, for these are part of the law and the prophets. They can not mean that with the world as it now is, we are to do away with armies and navies, with sheriffs and police courts, and return to the condition before the flood. In other words, to read Scripture aright we need both "spiritual intelligence and common sense," to quote Sir Robert Anderson. If the first be lacking, we shall refuse to believe anything outside of our ordinary experience; and if the second be lacking we shall fall into a literalism that will make the language of Scripture seem impossible if not ridiculous.

What our Lord is here referring to is a personal matter, the law of retaliation between man and man. He amplifies the statement further on by saying, "Whosoever smiteth thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also." But that this is not to be taken literally is seen in His own conduct. He meekly submitted to an officer who smote Him (John 18:22, 23), but did He turn to Him the other cheek? Instead of that, He offered a remonstrance, "If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why smitest thou me?"

In other words, as Pember says, what Christ means is, that, if we receive a personal insult we should bear it in love and without resentment, and even be prepared to endure another in the same spirit; but He does not mean that human governments shall cease to exact penalties for national or international crimes.

And as to loving our enemies. The way He came to speak of that was this: God had taught through Moses, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." But the Pharisees of Christ's day had supplemented that command by a fiendish addition to it which made it read like this: "Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy." Of course, this was altogether wrong. Our enemy is our neighbor

even while he is our enemy, and it is our duty to love rather than to hate him even when we are opposing and resisting him as our enemy. But to love him does not mean to fall upon his neck and kiss him. "If thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink," amenities that have been shown upon the battlefield time and time again.

Indeed, the President's address to Congress from which a quotation already has been made, is a fine illustration of what is meant by loving our enemy, when he is our enemy on a large scale. "We are the sincere friends of the German people," he goes on to say, "and shall desire nothing so much as the early re-establishment of intimate relations of mutual advantage between us, however hard it may be for them, for the time being, to believe that this is spoken from our hearts." Could anything be finer than this, or more finely said?

And now as to the warning that "they that take the sword shall perish with the sword" (Matt. 26:52). To Peter this was said after he cut off the ear of Malchus the servant of the high priest. But Peter had taken too literally what Christ had said about the sword a little while before. It was when the disciples had returned to Him with their report of the mission on which He had sent them two by two. "When I sent you without purse, and scrip, and shoes, lacked ye anything?" said He. They answered, "Nay." "But now," He added, and doubtless in view of His early departure from them, "He that hath a purse, let him take it, and likewise his scrip, and he that hath no sword let him sell his garment and buy one" (Luke 22:35, 36). In other words, while He was with them they were to do as He did, but when He departed from them they were to fall back on ordinary custom in these matters. They must not expect continually such miraculous interposition as would make them *independent of the use of means.* Bishop Ryle, of Liverpool, who was writing fifty years ago, and with no thought in mind of this war, expressly applies the passage as a caution against certain fanatical notions which he names, and one of these notions is that the support of police, and standing armies and courts of law is wrong.

Peter was using the sword in the defense of the Christian religion where it was out of place. He was using it in rebellion against an

order of the Roman magistrate, which was a crime. Such a use of it meant the forfeiting of his life and the lives of his brother disciples, and the bringing of his Master's cause into suspicion. Therefore our Lord commanded him to put up his sword saying: "They that take the sword shall perish with the sword." In other words, if you oppose the civil government hy force, you must expect to be met by force; which, in so far, is an argument for war, rather than against it.

## VII

One other question yet remains. What about the Christian who has conscientious scruples concerning war? It may be asked, What about him, who, notwithstanding all that has been said, can not bring himself, and for what he regards as Christian reasons, to bear arms against his fellow-man?

Of course, such scruples are to be respected but happily, the government itself has amply met them. The new army measure expressly says that nothing in that act shall be construed as compelling a person to serve in any of the forces for which it provides "who is a member of any sect whose principles forbid its members to participate in war, and whose religious convictions are against war. But no person so exempted shall be also exempt from service in some other capacity which the President shall declare to be non-combatant."

In other words, the farm, the factory, the hospital, the Red Cross, or the gospel ministry may be chosen as the place where such an one may honorably serve his country in her hour of need. As the President ominously said in his call for enrollment under the Act, "we have been wont to think of armies, but there are no more *armies* in the earlier sense of them. Entire nations now are armed. It is not an army that we must shape and train for war, *it is a nation.*" And so doubtless must it be henceforth, until Jesus comes. "Nation shall rise against nation."

One thinks of John Greenleaf Whittier, the Quaker poet of the Civil War. His peace principles made him personally a non-resistant. But his poem entitled, "Italy," shows that he regarded war as sometimes the messenger of God:

"God reigns, and let the earth rejoice!
I bow before His sterner plan;
Dumb are the organs of my choice;
He speaks in hattles stormy voice,
His praise is in the wrath of man!"

## VIII

In closing let me say, that the purpose and intent of this address is not to instruct Christians how to serve their country. It is simply to interpret or expound the Word of God to them as light has come to me upon it. It is to help Christians to see the *attitude* they should assume towards the present crisis. When that is plain their duty may be plain, or they may be more prepared to receive instruction as to duty from some other source better qualified to offer it. Just now, I speak for God and to help Christians in their relationship to God. As the editor of "The United Preshyterian" has recently so well said, there is much in this awful business of war so utterly contrary to the spirit of the gospel that sincere believers may well question what their attitude should be thereto. But one thing is very sure, namely, that the principles of truth and righteousness must be borne witness to and be upheld amidst the storm and strife at any cost.

Hence to begin with, there must be a definite commitment of ourselves unto the Lord. Strange experiences are before us, and paths are to be trodden that we have never known. How important therefore that we should daily walk with God! What a clarion call this is for sinners to accept Christ, and through faith in Him become reconciled to God! What a time for Christian witnesses to redouble their evangelistic efforts and for Christian parents to rebuild their family altars! What an obligation rests upon us to pray for the leaders of our nation and especially for the President of the United States, and for "the whole state of Christ's church militant," that she may he revived again by an outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon both ministers and people!

As our editor says, the question of our feelings towards those with whom we are at war is very pertinent. The "Hymn of Hate" must

not be sung by those who praise the grace of God. In many of our churches, as we are reminded by another, there are Teutons and Americans sitting side by side at the Lord's table. There must be no "hreak" among them, nay, indeed there can not be, because the "bond" that unites them is the fellowship of the Father and of His Son, Jesus Christ. They may have loyalty to the country of their natural birth, but they will have love toward the Author of their spiritual birth and toward all them who have been begotten by Him. This love is stronger than death because it is cemented in the blood of Emmanuel's veins.

A Christian worker who contemplated a chaplaincy in the army, recently said to me that his difficulty was the necessity that would he laid upon him to pray for victory for our arms. He was not a traitor, and he was not unpatriotic, but the difficulty was real. He was thinking of the chaplain in the German army, as sincere as he, who would he praying similarly for a victory for their arms. Could both be right? How could one Christian be arrayed against another Christian, and both be in the will of God?

The difficulty is not a new one. There has never heen a war in Christendom when it did not exist, and the solution of it is found in the personal relation of each man to the Lord Jesus Christ as a member of His body. The German Christian is serving Christ in obeying his government and the American Christian is doing the same, and *Christ is able to keep them both and to make them stand.* Nor is either of them required to pray for victory for their arms. To pray for the will of God to be done in the awful warfare is the better way, come victory or defeat.

I have a case somewhat in point. The last time I visited Europe, the year before the war I think, I met a German pastor to whom I was strongly drawn in Christ. I had planned for him to visit the Institute in the following summer, and the Institute would have been happy to have introduced him to the Summer Bible Conferences throughout our land for the spiritual blessing he would have brought to them. But the breaking out of the war prevented it. He is doing his best today to minister to the German soldiers, and to promote the interest of his fatherland I doubt not, and I expect to do

the same for my country. But I love that man still and he loves me; and when this cruel war is over, one of the earliest exchanges of hrotherly love I have in mind is to bring him here, just as it had been planned, and thus to demonstrate that there is a

"tie that binds
Our hearts in Christian love."

Finally, let us beware of false teachers and false teaching in these days! Spiritualism will be raising its unholy head aloft. There also will be those who will seek to revive interest in prayers for the dead. The new theology will be talking about salvation through death on the battlefield instead of salvation through the vicarious death of Christ. Especially will excitable and untempered Christians be setting dates for the coming of the Lord, and cries of "Lo! here," and "Lo! there," are likely to be heard. "Take heed that no man deceive you." But "abide in him, that when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming."

"If He should come today!
The Prince of Peace amidst the clank of war
and battle heat,
O, would we haste to lay our weapons down
Before His feet?

"O, poor, and weak and blind!
Living for self, we make our petty plans,
Map out each year;
Forgetting, in an hour we know not of
He may appear.

"O, gentle, pitying Christ!
Delay Thy coming to the weary soul
So sick of sin;
Draw close Thy cords of love, until his heart
Shall take Thee in.

"Then come! at morn or eve!
Whether in manhood, youth or feeble age
Thy visit fall,
To him who loves Thee all is well, since Christ
Is all in all."

—Helen A. Beard.